Canadian Centre
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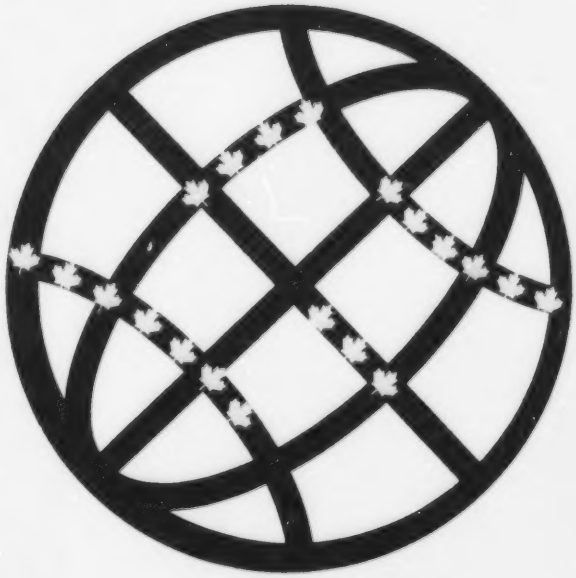
# Policy Options



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# ROUNDTABLE ON CANADA AND NIGERIA

Founders College, York University
Toronto

# Roundtable on Canada & Nigeria

*Founders College, York University*
*Toronto*
*September 8, 1997*

**Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development**
**&**
**Ad Hoc Committee on Nigeria**

101-00632/

# Roundtable on Canada & Nigeria

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**Executive Summary**

The Ad Hoc Committee on Nigeria organized the Roundtable, with the support of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development. There were 30 participants. (See below for list of participants). Ayo Obe, Aaron Gana and Femi Falana were invited as Nigerian resource persons under the CIDA-sponsored Nigerian Visitors Program. Unfortunately Femi Falana could not attend due to security reasons; however, he sent his remarks which were distributed. The workshop was chaired by Kathleen Keating, Commonwealth Lawyers Association.

The purpose of the meeting was to review Canadian policy towards Nigeria and suggest policy options for both the immediate and long term. The meeting was timed to inform Canadian policy options in the upcoming Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group meeting [September 12th] and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting [October 24th - 27th ]. Among others, the following recommendations were made: support for human rights and pro-democracy movements in Nigeria and those outside, support for Radio Kudirat as part of larger communication strategy in Nigeria, continuation and expansion of the Democratic Development Fund, monitoring of Abacha's transition program, support for in-Canada education and advocacy work, targeted sanctions on oil equipment and the freezing of the accounts of the military junta and their families and collaborators.

The Agenda follows:

OPENING Opening Remarks: John van Mossel, CUSO, Ad Hoc Committee on Nigeria
Welcome: Prof. Patricia Stamp, Master, Founders College, York University
Objectives of the Roundtable: Kathleen Keating, Chair

SESSION ONE
Update on Canadian Foreign Policy: Dan George, Joe Stern, DEFAIT

SESSION TWO
Update on Current Situation and Assessment of the Transition Program: Ayo Obe , CLO

SESSION THREE
Support for Democratic Movements at the International Level: Usman Akano, COHDEN
Support for Democratic Movements at the National Level: Ayo Obe
Other International Linkages: The Hon. Flora McDonald, pAC

SESSION FOUR
How to Assess and Strengthen Democracy in Nigeria: Aaron Gana, Centre for Democratic Governance, Ayo Obe, Paul Puritt, CLC, Kenna Owoh, ICA

SESSION FIVE
New Options and Ideas, including the Role of Canadian Civil Society: Evan Potter, Carleton University, Tim Shaw, Dalhousie, Diana Barikor-Wiwa, MOSOP

CLOSING Summary: Kathleen Keating
Thanks: Kole Shettima, University of Toronto

We were joined at lunch by Dr. Lorna Marsden, President, York University

## I Update on Canadian Policy on Nigeria

### Dan George

Canada has always tried to exercise its influence in areas where it can make a difference and is using a variety of channels to influence the situation in Nigeria.

#### Direct communication

Canada tried to talk directly to the Nigerian government for as long as possible. When Nigeria closed its Canadian mission a year ago, attempts were made through the Canadian High Commission in Lagos. That mission was closed in March, after being frustrated for some time by the Nigerian government. Nevertheless, Canada has continued to maintain contact through the Nigerian representative in New York.

#### Commonwealth

When the Commonwealth Games were hosted in Calgary in 1994, Canada refused to allow the retinue of Nigerian Generals to accompany the athletes. Prime Minister Chretién spoke of the need for a democracy initiative and this took shape at the Auckland CHOGM in 1995.

At Auckland Canada took the lead in urging Nigeria to respect the Harare Declaration. After the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and the other Ogonis Canada called for Nigeria's expulsion from the Commonwealth. Canada also supported the adoption of the Milbrook Declaration and creation of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to promote the Harare Declaration and to monitor human rights violations in the Commonwealth.

Canada is one of eight countries represented on CMAG, which reports to the Commonwealth Heads of State. Its focus is on Nigeria, Gambia and Sierra Leone. The group traveled to Nigeria in 1996, without a Canadian representative after Nigeria refused visas to officials in the Canadian party. That mission met with General Abacha but did not meet Abiola and other opposition leaders, and did not visit Ogoniland. CMAG recommended a number of non-economic measures against Nigeria, which were suspended pending further discussions. In July, CMAG met in London and heard from a range of Nigerian and Commonwealth NGOs, who impressed upon the Ministers that the situation requires action. The Ministers will write their own recommendations to CHOGM. CMAG will continue and Canada hopes to remain as a member.

#### United Nations

Canada has worked with other countries in the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the General Assembly to keep attention focused on Nigeria. In 1995 a resolution on Nigeria at the HRC was defeated but in 1996 special rapporteurs on Independence of the Judiciary and on Summary Executions were appointed. They were frustrated by the Nigerian government and had to cancel their planned visit. In 1997 a resolution appointing a country rapporteur was passed but the appointee from Malawi resigned in August because of pressure from Nigeria. Another, less vulnerable appointee is being sought.

Canada is often painted as being isolated on Nigeria but in the United Nations Canada has been co-sponsoring resolutions which have passed with sizable majorities and at CMAG Canada is with the majority.

#### Bilateral Aid

Canada continues to direct aid to civil society through NGOs. The Democratic Development Fund was created after Auckland, with the same 3 focus countries as CMAG. It is intended to give operational capacity to civil society in those countries. An evaluation meeting was scheduled for later in the week, but the fund is generally seen as a positive step.

### Business community

The government has tried to work with the Canadian business community. The outcome is that Canadian exports to Nigeria in the first half of 1997 exceed the total for 1996 and 1995 more than doubled the export performance of 1994.
A business forum was convened last November and, under leadership from Canadian Occidental, has decided to adopt a code of conduct.

### Conclusion

There are concerns about the transition process in Nigeria but Canada must work with that process because there is no alternative. CHOGM must call for release of political prisoners and an opening up of the political process.

**Joe Stern**

CMAG has been a tough process but there has been real progress. The high quality of presentations in July impressed the Ministers. The draft report has been prepared and it is very strong, in its language and its analysis.
The Commonwealth is beginning to pay attention to the real quality of democracy and not just its form. CMAG's press releases have been categorical in drawing attention to the sham transition process, political exclusion and lack of respect for fundamental human rights. The Hon. Lloyd Axworthy is taking the lead in consulting with his colleagues on CMAG to decide the next course of action.

## II The Situation in Nigeria

**Ayo Obe**

The economic, social and political life in Nigeria is decaying.

### Economic

Human rights advocates are always faced with the argument that Abacha has brought stability and that human rights don't feed people.
However, in Nigeria today the overall picture is one of scarcity and collapse:

- about 40% of vehicles are idle because of the fuel shortage. This results in widespread lateness and absenteeism and consequent decline in productivity. (Lagos is well supplied with fuel but the rest of the country faces scarcity and high prices.)
- Power outages are common: most firms that have generators use them 6 hours a day.
- industrial capacity utilization has gone from 32.4% in 1996 to 25% in the first half of 1997.
- unemployment is exacerbated by retrenchment in both the private and public sectors.
- in Kaduna, 30,000 workers were fired for striking to obtain a package that had already been promised to them.
- road construction and repairs are merely cosmetic.
- telephone service is sporadic and expensive; internet access is still being debated.
- there is no accountability for government expenditures: ECOMOG expenses in Liberia are reported as being "between 3 - 4 Billion Naira".
- the Petrol Trust Fund is run by a sole administrator with no accountability and no benefit accruing to the people.
- business planning is risky because of the arbitrariness of government decisions.

### Social

Corruption is rampant. Transparency International ranked Nigeria tops for perceived corruption.

Airport workers ask all returning travelers: "What did you bring for me?" Court documents cannot be filed without bribes. Contracts are padded to grotesque levels.
Dishonesty is endemic and is a symptom of malaise in a society which has so little hope.
Another symptom is the growth of "miracle churches" and ritual killings, especially associated with election campaigns.
Crime fighting initiatives involve grave infractions of human rights.
Education is on the decline. Nigerian university degrees are less and less recognized internationally. Schools are closing and the quality of teaching is declining.
Many Nigerians patronize traditional doctors because they cannot afford medical clinics. The immunization program has collapsed. Infant mortality is high. As much as 70% of the prescription drugs in circulation are fake or expired. AIDS is a disaster waiting to happen. The numbers of medical doctors leaving Nigeria is alarming: a recent conference of ex patriot Nigerian doctors in the United States drew 4,000 delegates.

## Political

The Constitution is not well known and it is not easy even to obtain a copy of it in Nigeria. The government prefers that it not be available, because they intend to continue to shift the goalposts.
The transition program has become a disguise for the consolidation of the military regime of General Abacha as it becomes increasingly evident that he intends to succeed himself, as President. But there are difficulties in his way:

- the issue of political prisoners
- Abiola's increasing stature
- the absolute failure of his economic program
- the careless handling of the local government elections
- an awakening by many churches to the dangers of the present situation
- political parties' (with some exceptions) failure to address the real issues and
- the lack of preparation by the military to live under any kind of civilian rule (no mental preparation for subjecting themselves to the rule of law).

## Human rights

The government has breached every one of the civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Those arrested for the 1990 alleged coup plot are still detained. President-elect Abiola, the Ogoni 19, labour leaders, alleged bomb plotters, and many others are in jail without trial. Relatives of those who have gone overseas are picked up. Journalists are being arrested less often, but are still being harassed.

## Reason for hope

There is reason for hope. Pro-democracy groups came together in 1995 for an all-Nigeria summit on human rights: this led to formation of the United Action for Democracy (UAD), which facilitates unity amongst all these groups, including NADECO, the National Association of Democratic Lawyers, and individuals such as Chief Gani Fawehinmi, who had been outside NADECO. UAD was able to bring these participants together to mark Abiola's 60th birthday, and has been able to obtain consensus on many issues: release of political prisoners, end to military rule, and a government of national unity. If it is to be headed by Abiola, there must be convened a sovereign national conference.
In order to challenge Abacha's claim that he is doing a good job of running the country, UAD published a series of questions for Nigerians to ask themselves and got a good response from the public.

### Challenges

Apart from NADECO, the opposition is not active, because threats hang over peoples' heads. The general public accepts Abacha's stated plan and are ready to participate in local and state elections: this is one reason for holding the presidential election on the same day.
Pro-democracy groups need to offer concrete alternatives and they need real support for their political activities. They were able to attend CMAG because governments were willing to provide financial support.

## III(a) Support for Democratic Groups at the International Level

### Dr. Usman Akano

(Dr. Akano's paper was read by Dr. Patricia Williams.)
Thanks were given to the international community for allowing Nigerian "dissidents" to move freely in their countries and organize conferences; for support for Radio Kudirat, for granting asylum to Nigerians who are victims of Abacha's regime, and for limited sanctions on Nigeria.
In the US, a Nigeria Democracy Act is working its way up through Congress. Local citizens groups have persuaded municipal governments to stop doing business with companies involved in Nigeria. Similar efforts will be introduced in Canada and the United Kingdom.
Canadian efforts to change the attitude of the world community are commendable. Canada has tried, through its NGOs, to strengthen Nigerian civil society and through its business community to support a code of conduct that will benefit the Nigerian democracy movement. All of these achievements have been the work of many groups based in Canada. Assistance from other organizations such as Greenpeace and MOSOP have also been invaluable.
The democracy movement asks for continuing support for Radio Kudirat and for democracy education, particularly in rural settings. At CHOGM, Canada should commit itself to expelling Nigeria from the Commonwealth and should press for full implementation of the sanctions agreed to by CMAG.
Finally, the Commonwealth must help with the retraining of soldiers and police to respect democracy. This might provide a guarantee against further military coups.

## III(b) Support for Democratic Groups at the National Level

### Ayo Obe

#### Human rights education

When Babangida was put out of power it was felt that much had been achieved, but the democracy movement had not put its roots down deep enough in Nigerian society. Political naivety allowed the politicians to hand over power to the military. There needs to be widespread support for education of people in all regions of Nigeria - not just the southwest where the focus traditionally has been.
Groups such as the CLO are not as close to the ground as local groups. The CLO does have programs through churches and unions and also an Islamic program - recognizing that Abacha plays the religious card to divide and discredit opposition forces.
Education at the local level should focus on paralegals who could educate people about their rights, who should protect them, what demands they can make on the state and how they can claim their rights. Only an informed people can effectively counter government propaganda.

#### Political struggle

The CLO supports the political struggle, often at the expense of being able to pay staff salaries. The real work must be done within Nigeria. There is propaganda on the television every night, which the government uses to separate the people outside Nigeria from those inside by depicting exiles as trouble makers. The people inside Nigeria need to be able to say: "we are ready for this

(democratic government)".
Leaflets are a more effective medium for delivering political messages than newspapers, which tend to be read only by the elite.

### III(c) Other International Linkages

#### The Hon. Flora MacDonald

CHOGM is a critical event for Nigeria's future and pressure can be brought to bear, but it requires steps to be taken in advance.
For example, major statements by well-known international organizations such as Amnesty International and by African human rights organizations such as FemNet in the time leading up to CHOGM will be important. PEN is another example. The message needs to get to heads of government that there is an active community. Continued suspension is likely but there is a need to ensure that this is not avoided.
Nigeria is heavily involved in Sierra Leone and the Roman Catholic Archbishop has expressed gratitude to Nigeria: Sierra Leone is not going to support increased sanctions. How many other countries will be in the same position? Consider the example of the UN rapporteur who resigned. Therefore, there has to be a strategy to single out key African countries who can be supported to take a stand against the Nigerian regime.
There is a concern about the role of Chief Anyouku and whether he believes the transition process is on track. He may be influencing others toward that view, especially some of the smaller countries.
It may be that CMAG is too large a group. Perhaps it should consist of 5 foreign ministers - one from each of the major regions plus the President and Vice-President of the conference, because they are in charge of the conference agenda.
Ms. MacDonald has concerns about the way human rights issues are evolving in certain Commonwealth countries, especially in East Asia. Attitudes about "Western values" and actions are being expressed in Malaysia, for example, that ought not to be brought into the Commonwealth. It will be important to look to other Asian countries such as India to shore up traditional Commonwealth values.

#### The Hon. Walter McLean

The Commonwealth has 4 northern, white countries. The rest are in the south. With global aid packages etc., the issue of southern solidarity becomes dangerous. It is important to ensure that human rights are not characterized as a northern issue.
A good governance forum was held in Addis Ababa on July 11: it produced a statement that good governance is the most critical issue facing African countries today. Half of the countries that took part are Commonwealth countries. They spoke of the importance of tradition and culture and came to a clear consensus on the importance of a range of values including transparency, civil society, judicial independence, rule of law, constitutional guarantees, and so on. Is there a linkage to some of the authors of that document? Will some of them be at CHOGM?

### IV Assessing & Strengthening Democracy in Nigeria

#### Prof. Aaron Gana

There is widespread acceptance in Nigeria of the concept of democracy, but many Nigerians believe the military can give it to them. People don't understand what democracy means, beyond elections.
A survey conducted last March showed 95% of Nigerians believe that democracy is the best form of government for Nigeria, but only 3.5% are willing to work for its realization. The questions then becomes how to strengthen that 3.5% to help them actualize their aspirations for

democracy? Some suggestions:

- remove the requirement for security clearances which effectively excludes those not in sympathy with the regime from political activity;
- a Commonwealth monitoring group to oversee the transition;
- in the longer term, bridging the gap between North and South with support for grassroots projects in the North: if the North were saturated with NGOs as is the South, the 1993 election would not have been annulled;
- also in the long term, raising Nigerians' consciousness so that the regime cannot use religion as a divisive tool.

### Ayo Obe

Money is needed to help bridge the North-South gap. The grassroots, in the North especially, have to understand what democracy means.

### Paul Puritt

The CLC/CTUC West African project's regional and local educational activities contribute to democratic governance in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Ghana, strengthening strengthens capacity of trade unions as members of civil society and contributing to democratic transition.

The trade union movement has moved beyond its traditional role to provide a model of democratic accountability and campaign for government openness and transparency. As a mass-based, democratic and non-sectarian organization, representative of the poor and dispossessed, it is the *de facto* opposition in the emergent and fragile democracies of the region. It provides a united platform for workers regardless of ethnic, religious and geographic considerations, and embodies democratic norms.

In Nigeria the CLC/CTUC has conducted leadership workshops and workshops for education officers and for women. It has published labour fact sheets, developed educational materials, set national democracy education priorities, trained grassroots activists, supported regional interaction of key trade unionists, delivered workplace education and conducted study visits to Canada by key trade union educators.

The struggle for democracy in these countries requires a long term commitment and a partnership among NGOs and government. This is undermined when the Canadian government, on the basis of gender and class, refuses visas for African trade unionists to participate in study visits.

### Kenna Owoh

The CIDA-sponsored Community Development Program (CDP) supports various initiatives to strengthen democratic development at the local level. It operates on 4 assumptions:

1. democracy is strengthened through practice;
2. democracy is based on empowerment of citizens to recognize and claim their rights;
3. one important approach to strengthening democratic development is working with grassroots organizations, community organizations, women's groups, ethnic associations, etc.;
4. women's contribution to social reproduction must be acknowledged, and gender issues must inform democratic struggles

The CDP has been a good initiative. To date, it has supported over 25 civil society groups across a spectrum of entry points ranging from "development" to "human rights/democracy" initiatives, and in all regions of Nigeria. In addition, the Program staff and Committee members continue to reflect on the indicators of democratic development in a context of repression. Future directions should involve developing more effective regional and national strategies, linking grassroots organizations to national human rights organizations and pro-democracy groups, and designing

participatory research to evaluate the Program. There is also a need to keep a link between Canadian and African NGOs working on issues of democratic development regionally, and those in Nigeria.

## V New Options & Ideas

### Prof. Evan Potter

Canadian foreign policy on Nigeria needs serious reconsideration. It can be characterized as leadership without followers. On the other hand, Canada has enhanced its position in the Commonwealth because it has maintained its position.

Sanctions are a blunt instrument. Any attempt at an oil embargo would be met by serious sanction-busting. The US and Europe will not participate in an embargo, so how effective could it be?

### Prof. Tim Shaw

Ways must be found to keep the world's attention on the situation in Nigeria. Positive and negative incentives include:

- visa restrictions on the ruling elite and their dependents
- freezing of assets
- codes of conduct
- the World Bank as a possible ally
- communications tools (airlines, telephone, internet, etc.)
- athletics sanctions
- targeted sanctions, particularly aimed at spare parts for Nigerian industry, and technology transfers
- linkages among woman and youth - such as the Nova Scotia/Gambia connection.

Retraining of the military has to be supported, and reinforcement of legal institutions.

### Ayo Obe

The military regime can be hurt by visa restrictions. A sanction aimed at football would be terribly unpopular in Nigeria, but that's the point.

Release of the coup plotters and the Ogoni 19 would create a momentum in the country.

It will be difficult to get support from those West African countries whose leaders Abacha has bribed.

### Diana Barikor-Wiwa

Soccer has been used by the regime to lift the peoples' spirits, so a ban on international competition would hurt the government. The elite send their children abroad to school, so visa restrictions could be an effective tool.

Oil sanctions are the only way, however, to effectively influence the military regime, because it is so dependent on oil revenues.

Leaflets, published in local languages, are the most effective way to mobilize people, especially in the Niger delta.

### Dr. Kole Shettima

Nigerians listen to radio, so Canada should support Radio Kudirat and Radio Canada. Also, leafletting in local languages is important. Many people inside Nigeria do not know what is going on. They need to be informed.

## VI Suggested Directions

### In Nigeria

- Financial support is needed to support the work of NGOs both inside and outside Nigeria, particularly in the area of grassroots education about the meaning and practices of democracy
- Continue support for the DDF and the CDP; develop mechanisms to link NGO grass roots education and national human rights and pro-democracy groups in Nigeria.
- Financial support is needed for Radio Kudirat; explore the possibility of a broader communication strategy for Nigeria

### In Canada

- Canada must continue to condemn the Nigerian military regime, in the strongest terms, for continued violation of the civil, political and economic rights of its citizens
- Canada must press for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Nigeria
- Financial support is needed for in-Canada social mobilization and education on Nigeria linked to social mobilization and education in Nigeria

### International

- Monitoring of the transition process, through Commonwealth and United Nations channels must be supported
- At the governmental and NGO levels, alliances should be forged with other African countries, particularly those that signed the OAU covenant on good governance, to put pressure on the Nigerian regime to honour its principles
- Asian Commonwealth countries such as India should be encouraged to help diffuse possible East-West tensions over human rights and democratic values
- Pressure should be exerted on the Nigerian regime through:
    - a ban on Nigeria's soccer team competing outside the country
    - visa restrictions on the ruling elite and their families to prevent them from traveling and studying abroad
    - targeted sanctions aimed at stopping the supply of spare parts to Nigerian industry
    - freezing the accounts of the junta and their collaborators

**Participants**

Dan George, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Joe Stern, Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Diana Barikor-Wiwa, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People
John Oladehinde, Canadian-Africa Democratic Movement for Nigeria
Hon. Flora MacDonald, Partnership Africa-Canada
John Van Mossel, CUSO
Ayo Obe, Civil Liberties Organization
Patricia Williams, Canadian Organization for Human Rights and Democracy in Nigeria
Kenna Owoh, Inter Church Action
Michael O'Shaughnessy, Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development
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Paul Pruitt, Canadian Labour Congress
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